

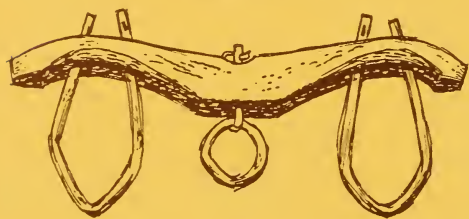
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CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1961



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Stephen Arnold Douglas
Chicagoan and Patriot

Stephen Arnold Douglas

CHICAGOAN
AND PATRIOT

*An Address Delivered at the
Chicago Historical Society, June 2, 1961, by*

PAUL M. ANGLE



CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY—1961

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INTRODUCING MR. ANGLE

This commemorative meeting is being held under the joint sponsorship of the Chicago Historical Society and the Civil War Centennial Commission of the City of Chicago.

This commission does not propose to "celebrate" the centennial of the Civil War. Our entire program will accent the word "commemorate." If we can reflect on the history of our country a century ago and in some small measure realize the significance of the contribution made by millions of Americans who fought, and in all too many cases died, for their country, our activities will have been worth while. We will not re-enact any battles or sponsor any pageants, but will mark the centennial anniversary of the significant events of the Civil War by meetings such as this and by a program of publications and educational aids.

War is much too terrible to glorify. William Tecumseh Sherman and Robert E. Lee may have been on opposite sides of the war but they certainly agreed here. Sherman put it bluntly and eloquently when he said, "War is Hell!" and Lee more delicately phrased it, "It is well that war is so terrible—we should grow too fond of it." We hope to concern ourselves in the next four years with a careful consideration of the lives and motives of men who fought to preserve the Union and others who fought to preserve what they sincerely believed to be their rights. We can respect them both and recall the

statement of Charles Francis Adams who, in speaking of these men, said, "whichever way he decided, if only he decided honestly, putting self-interest behind him, he decided right."

We meet tonight on the eve of the one hundredth anniversary of the death of a great American, a great Illinoisan, a great Chicagoan. To address us on this occasion we have an individual who need not be introduced here. I present the Director of the Chicago Historical Society, who will address you on the subject, "Stephen Arnold Douglas, Chicagoan and Patriot."

RALPH G. NEWMAN

*Chairman, Civil War Centennial
Commission of the City of Chicago*

Stephen Arnold Douglas
Chicagoan and Patriot

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO TODAY THOUSANDS OF CHICAGOANS WERE saddened by the knowledge that Stephen A. Douglas was dying. Knots of people gathered in front of the newspaper offices for the latest bulletins; others talked with subdued voices in the lobby of the Tremont House, where the United States Senator from Illinois struggled for life.

Shortly after nine o'clock the following morning, June 3, 1860, the Court House bell began to toll. No one needed to ask the reason. All knew that the "Little Giant," only forty-eight years of age, had died.

Few men in American history have stirred the emotions of the people as did Stephen A. Douglas. It was not merely that he was high placed—the leader of his party in the Senate and in the Union, and only a few months earlier a formidable contender for the presidency. His appeal came equally from personal qualities—from his courage, his pugnacity, and that indefinable something we call magnetism. His hold over people is illustrated by an experience which I heard the late Albert J. Beveridge relate. When Beveridge was writing his life of Lincoln he interviewed an elderly man who had attended one of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Some allusion led Beveridge to remark: "I take it that you were a Douglas man." The old man's eyes flashed. "By God, Sir, I *am* a Douglas man!"

Douglas's Chicago followers had an additional reason for their affection. He was the city's own. Since 1847 he had called Chicago his residence. Although he lived, in fact, in

Washington, and stayed in hotel rooms when in Chicago, the designation was more than a political necessity. He was largely responsible for building the Illinois Central Railroad, a factor of the utmost importance in the city's growth. Confident of Chicago's future, he had invested heavily in real estate, and with characteristic open-handedness donated the land on which the original University of Chicago was located. Douglas's Chicago land purchases were, of course, a speculation, but be it said that he refused to speculate in the national territories, where the intimate knowledge he enjoyed as chairman of the Senate Committee on Territories would have revealed highly profitable opportunities.

The man thus beloved of Chicago was born in Brandon, Vermont, on April 23, 1813. His father, a physician, died suddenly a few weeks after the son's birth. The boy lived with his mother in the home of an uncle until he was seventeen, when the widow remarried and moved to western New York. Young Stephen, who had spent some time in common schools, entered nearby Canandaigua Academy. At the same time he began to study law in the office of a local lawyer.

But the boy was restless, ambitious, and entranced by what he had heard of the fast-growing West. One June day in 1832, when he was nineteen, he struck out for himself. At Cleveland, then a mere village, he found work as a student law clerk, but he was soon prostrated by serious illness. Recovering, he pushed on to Cincinnati and then to St. Louis. When he could find no place in either city, he decided to try a small town where he could set up a school. His choice fell on Jacksonville, Illinois, but it was already supplied with teachers. He moved on to nearby Winchester, arriving there on a November night with three bits, or 37½ cents, in his pocket.

The young man made friends at once, as he would all his life. They rounded up some forty pupils for him, and the problem of his immediate future was solved.

Douglas had already made a firm decision. Within a week

of his arrival at Winchester he wrote home that he had become "a Western man, with Western feelings, principles and interests," and intended to make Illinois, then "the West," his home. But he had no intention of remaining a schoolteacher. The law still attracted him. Through a perfunctory examination he won a license, and in the spring of 1833 moved to Jacksonville, the seat of Morgan County, and hung out his shingle.

The law would remain his ostensible profession, but his real calling was politics. He was soon neck-deep in that rough-and-tumble occupation—really rough-and-tumble in a state barely removed from the frontier. From the start he allied himself with the rambunctious party of Andrew Jackson. His first political move was an audacious one—to unseat the Whig state's attorney and obtain the place himself. At that time the state's attorney was elected by the legislature, which meant that the diminutive young man of twenty-one, a lawyer of unproved capacity, had to convince the sixty-six members of the Senate and House that he was better suited for the place than the Jacksonville patrician, John J. Hardin, who held it. Douglas succeeded, aided, no doubt, by the fact that the Democrats had a majority in both houses.

The state's attorney's office was only a stepping-stone. At the earliest opportunity, which came in three years, Douglas ran for the Illinois House of Representatives. Among the six successful candidates from Morgan County he ranked second, polling only nine votes fewer than the top man, and 158 more than the winner of third place. It is not recorded that Douglas made a deep mark on the tenth General Assembly, but he did become acquainted with a young Whig Representative from the next-door county of Sangamon, Abraham Lincoln.

Whatever Douglas's aspirations as a legislator may have been, he gave them up readily enough when he was offered an appointment as Register of the Land Office at Springfield. But the flame of ambition burned hot. What, he asked in a letter to a member of his family in New York, would his

mother think "if the people of Illinois should be so foolish as to send her prodigal son to Congress?" That the people of Illinois came very close to doing. In 1837 Douglas won the Democratic nomination for the central Illinois district and set out with zest to oppose the Whig nominee, Abraham Lincoln's law partner, John T. Stuart. Douglas found campaigning to his liking. "I live with my constituents," he wrote, "eat with my constituents, drink with them, lodge with them, pray with them, laugh, hunt, dance and work with them; I eat their corn dodgers and fried bacon and sleep two in a bed with them." The Whigs had considered the election a walk-away, but the young Democrat, already known as the Little Giant, lost by 36 votes out of a total of 36,495.

Douglas turned back to the law, and for two years practiced with considerable success. Yet he could not, and would not, put politics out of mind. He threw himself heart and soul into the rip-roaring campaign of 1840 ("Tippecanoe and Tyler Too") and was rewarded with appointment as Secretary of State of Illinois. Within a year he became the leader in a partisan scheme to win control of the state supreme court by enlarging its membership from four to nine, and was paid for his trouble by appointment as one of the new judges.

(The incident gave Lincoln material for one of his sharpest jabs in the course of the famous debates. Douglas had been contending that the Dred Scott decision, handed down by the United States Supreme Court, must be accepted as the law of the land. "Let me ask you," Lincoln said at Quincy, "didn't Judge Douglas find a way to reverse the decision of our Supreme Court, when it decided that Carlin's father—old Governor Carlin—had not the constitutional power to remove a Secretary of State? Did he not appeal to the 'MOBS' as he calls them? Did he not make speeches in the lobby to show how villainous that decision was, and how it ought to be overthrown? Did he not succeed too in getting an act passed by the legislature to have it overthrown? And didn't he himself sit down on that bench as one of the five added

judges, who were to overslaugh the four old ones—getting his name of ‘Judge’ in that way and no other? If there is a villainy in using disrespect or making opposition to Supreme Court decisions, I commend it to Judge Douglas’ earnest consideration.”)

William H. Herndon once said of Lincoln that “his ambition was a little engine that knew no rest.” The same characterization could have been applied even more aptly to Douglas. In 1842 he became a candidate for election to the United States Senate, an office then filled by the legislature. Although he lacked five months of the constitutional requirement that Senators be thirty years of age, he came within five votes of being elected. The next year he ran for the national House of Representatives from the western Illinois district—he lived in Quincy at the time—and won by a majority of 215 votes in a total of 17,069.

Douglas had now found his place in the national scene. There, in increasingly prominent positions, he would remain, a Representative until 1847, thereafter a Senator.

Even in the large membership of the House Douglas soon attained distinction. His appearance attracted attention. Above the waist his was a massive figure—a heavy torso, thick neck surmounted by a full round face topped by a shock of black wavy hair. Abnormally short legs reduced his height to five feet four inches, exactly one foot shorter than Lincoln. A deep resonant voice and a quick mind ever alert to an opponent’s lapses made him an impressive speaker.

In the Congress, Douglas quickly revealed his basic political principle. Above all else he was a nationalist. When James K. Polk, the Democratic candidate for President in 1844, came out in favor of the annexation of Texas and the American claim to the whole of Oregon (“Fifty-four forty or fight”) Douglas supported him with enthusiasm. When Polk compromised the Oregon dispute for the forty-ninth parallel, Douglas sulked, but in the war with Mexico he sprang to the support of the administration.

In the Senate, as chairman of the Committee on Territories, Douglas guided the internal expansion of the nation. Unfortunately for his reputation, the problem of slavery was inextricably involved. Was the "peculiar institution," as the South preferred to call it, to be permitted in the national territories? And were new states, carved out of those territories, to come into the Union with slavery or without it?

Ever since 1820 the people of the country had lived in the belief that the problem of slavery in the territories had been settled. By the Missouri Compromise of that year Missouri, with slavery, had been admitted, but it was agreed that the westward extension of the state's southern boundary—the line of thirty-six degrees and thirty minutes—would be the permanent line of demarcation. Territory north of that line would be forever free.

But in 1850 Congress found itself with a bundle of problems. California, acquired in the war with Mexico, was applying for admission under a free-state constitution. Utah and New Mexico wanted territorial organization without any commitment on slavery. Abolitionists wanted to do away with slavery in the District of Columbia, the only place in the Union where the federal government had a right to act. Slaveholders, on the other hand, pressed for a stricter law for recovering fugitive slaves, a right promised by the Constitution.

Tempers flared. Many, in Congress and over the country, feared civil war. Henry Clay, the great compromiser, tied various measures into an "omnibus bill" which failed of passage even though Daniel Webster won the execration of New England by speaking in favor of it. It remained for the young Senator from Illinois—Douglas was then only thirty-seven—to untie the several measures of the omnibus bill and guide them through the Senate, and under his influence through the House as well, as separate measures. The adoption of the Compromise of 1850 is usually credited to Henry Clay, but Clay himself freely admitted that Douglas, "more than any

other individual," was responsible for it; while Jefferson Davis, then a Senator from Mississippi and an opponent of the Compromise, stated in debate that "if any man has a right to be proud of these measures it is the Senator from Illinois."

Thus Douglas was instrumental in quieting a serious threat to the Union. Four years later he would introduce a single measure that would undo all he had accomplished and start a chain of events that would lead to the disruption of the country.

Between 1850 and 1854 various interests—Missouri politicians, impatient settlers, promoters of a railroad to the Pacific—pressed for the organization of Nebraska, a huge area west of Iowa, Missouri, and Arkansas, as a territory. Early in 1854 Douglas, long favorable, considered the time propitious. From the Committee on Territories he reported a bill organizing the new territory. Anticipating, rightly, that the slavery question would be raised, the committee report asserted that the compromise measures of 1850 had established the principle that all matters relating to slavery should be left to the decision of territorial residents. The assertion, of doubtful validity, failed to satisfy the Southern extremists whose votes would be needed for the passage of the measure. Out of conferences a more extreme bill emerged: one which provided for two territories, Kansas and Nebraska, instead of one; explicitly repealed the old Missouri Compromise prohibition of slavery north of the latitude of $36^{\circ}30'$; and left the people "perfectly free to form and regulate their domestic institutions in their own way, subject only to the Constitution of the United States."

With the aid of the administration, Douglas managed to push the Nebraska Bill through both houses, but at a heavy price. The storm of disapproval was without precedent. Abraham Lincoln described a typical response when he wrote of himself that the repeal of the Missouri Compromise "aroused him" as never before. Lincoln would temporize for two years, but less cautious dissidents set out to form a new party, call-

ing itself Republican and dedicated to the prevention of the spread of slavery, within six weeks of the time the Nebraska Bill became law.

Douglas, in Washington, seems to have underestimated both the extent and the gravity of the opposition which his bill had aroused. He would soon learn. When Congress adjourned in late August he started for Chicago. He would say later that he could have traveled all the way by the light of his own burning effigy. In the city itself he saw many evidences of the ugly temper of the people, but with his usual courage he announced that he would speak on Friday night, September 1, and that his subject would be the Nebraska Bill. On that afternoon flags on boats tied up in the river were lowered to half-mast and church bells tolled until the hour of the meeting. At nightfall the Senator faced thousands in Court House Square. He had spoken no more than a few sentences when the heckling and hissing began. Douglas shouted that he had come there to speak, and would stay until morning if necessary. The crowd chanted:

“We won’t go home till morning, till morning, till morning,
We won’t go home till morning, till daylight doth appear.”

For hours the Senator faced his tormentors, attempting to speak whenever the noise abated, only to be drowned out by boos and insults. Finally he gave up. With a shout of defiance, he left the platform and returned to his hotel.

That the Chicago meeting was packed by Douglas’s enemies was soon evident. He began a round of speeches in northern Illinois, unfriendly country, and at all of them the audiences heard him with attention, if not with enthusiasm.

One result of the Nebraska Bill—and for Douglas a very important result—was the emergence of Lincoln. After a disappointing term in Congress the Springfield lawyer had practically retired from politics. But the new territorial policy, which made possible the extension of slavery onto what had been considered free soil, stirred him to the roots. He took

to the stump in support of Richard Yates, the Anti-Nebraska congressman from the Springfield district, and discovered that what he said was bringing an unprecedented response. By fall he had made himself Douglas's most formidable opponent. In early October the two men came together at Springfield, where the state fair was in progress. On the afternoon of October 3 Douglas spoke in the Hall of the House of Representatives; the next afternoon Lincoln replied from the same platform. Two weeks later they met again at Peoria, Douglas speaking in the afternoon, Lincoln at night.

By this time both men had perfected their positions. To Douglas, the uproar over the Nebraska Act with its repeal of the Missouri Compromise was the work of zealots hopelessly divorced from reality. The overriding consideration—the national consideration—was the organization of the territories, where new settlers could create farms and towns and before too long new states. In the territories the right of self-government should be complete, meaning that the settlers themselves should decide whether or not they wanted slavery. Climate and soil, Douglas believed, would limit the number of slaves to a few, and this was surely a small price to pay for the maintenance of the fundamental principle of democracy and the extension of the nation.

By courage, energy, oratorical skill, and force of personality, Douglas held the large, hard core of his party in the North, but in the South men who had once followed his lead slipped away. In that section his very reasonableness, his indifference to a slight extension of slavery, worked against him. Southern fire-eaters would settle for nothing less than positive affirmation of the benefits of the institution. And no man, no matter how persuasive, could have prevented the growth of the Republican party when watered by the fanatical extremists who were forcing "Bleeding Kansas" to the verge of civil war.

Nevertheless, by the presidential year of 1856 Douglas stood high among the contenders for the Democratic nomi-

nation. He could not, however, overcome the advantage enjoyed by colorless old James Buchanan who, as Minister to England, wore no scars from the domestic troubles of the past two years. After the sixteenth ballot Douglas's supporters recognized that he could not win. With his permission, granted in advance, they withdrew his name, thus making it possible for Buchanan to attain the necessary two-thirds majority.

(Perhaps it will not be out of order to note that if Douglas had won the nomination and the election, which seems likely, he would have been inaugurated at the age of forty-three. In the polemical literature of the time I have seen no disparaging reference to his comparative youthfulness.)

The presidency out of mind, Douglas faced what he knew would be a bitter battle for his own survival. He would be up for re-election to the Senate in 1858. His opponent, he could see, would be Abraham Lincoln, whose efforts in 1854, and again in 1856, had made him the acknowledged leader of the Republican party in Illinois. Douglas had no illusions about Lincoln: he recognized in the Springfield lawyer a skilful debater with tenacity equal to his own. Douglas also knew that he would be opposed not only by Republicans but also by wavering Old Whigs and, because of a bitter feud with Buchanan, by such Democrats as the President could control.

We need not indulge in an extended discussion of the campaign of 1858. The story of that long struggle aimed at the election of legislators pledged to vote for one candidate or the other—a struggle which began in August and lasted until the first week of November, with both Lincoln and Douglas speaking before hundreds of party rallies and meeting seven times in joint debate—is familiar to all who have read the nation's history. It is of interest, however, to compare the reception accorded to Douglas in Chicago at the outset of the campaign with the reception, already described, which he received in 1854.

In 1858, on the afternoon of July 9, four hundred Demo-

crats afire with enthusiasm met Douglas in Michigan City to escort him to Chicago. Two hours later, as the Senator's train pulled along the lake front toward the Central station, Captain Smith's artillery company banged out a salute of 150 guns. When Douglas alighted several thousand ecstatic followers, already in line of march, broke into prolonged cheers. Between buildings bedecked with flags and party banners the procession escorted the Little Giant to the Tremont House. There, from a second story balcony, he faced a crowd that filled every foot of Lake and Dearborn streets, and held its members for the three hours that he used to expound the issues he would press upon the people of Illinois in the next four months. The meeting was proof that he had regained—more than regained—the position which he had almost lost four years earlier.

As the campaign itself is familiar, so is the outcome: Douglas's re-election by a legislative vote of fifty-four to forty-six, even though the Republicans carried their state ticket into office.

Nor is it necessary here to present a detailed account of Douglas's nomination for the presidency in 1860 and the fragmentation of the Democratic Party. At the national convention, held in Charleston in April, seven delegations from Southern states withdrew in implacable anger when the platform makers turned down a plank asserting the right of Congress to intervene in a territory to protect slave property. For fifty-seven ballots Douglas led the field of aspirants, but he could not win the requisite two-thirds majority. After ten futile days the convention adjourned to meet in June at Baltimore. There other Southern delegations withdrew, and Douglas was nominated by acclamation. But his victory became an empty one when the bolters nominated John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky, thus splitting the party beyond repair and practically assuring the election of Lincoln.

More meaningful, for our purpose, is the campaign which Douglas waged. Although he was tempted, at the outset, to

follow established tradition and make no overt effort in his own behalf, he soon concluded that the plight of the country, with disunion in plain sight, was too perilous to permit him a passive role. In July and August he made a number of speeches in New England, and then invaded the South in order, as he said, to "urge the duty of all to submit to the verdict of the people and maintain the Union." On August 25 he spoke at Norfolk, Virginia. He had talked only a few minutes when a question came up from the audience: "If Abraham Lincoln be elected President of the United States, will the Southern States be justified in seceding from the Union?"

"To this I emphatically answer no," he shot back. "The election of a man to the Presidency by the American people in conformity with the Constitution of the United States *would not justify any attempt at dissolving this glorious confederacy.*"

A second question was presented. If states seceded after Lincoln's inauguration, but before any overt act against their constitutional rights, would he advise or vindicate resistance to the decision?

His response was equally emphatic: "I . . . *would do all in my power to aid the Government of the United States in maintaining the supremacy of the laws against all resistance to them, come from whatever quarter it might.*"

From Norfolk Douglas moved on to Raleigh, North Carolina, where he told his auditors that he "would hang every man higher than Haman who would attempt to resist by force the execution of any provision of the Constitution which our fathers made and bequeathed to us." Back in New York, in mid-September, he was even more blunt: "I wish to God we had an Old Hickory now alive in order that he might hang Northern and Southern traitors on the same gallows."

From the east coast Douglas turned to Pennsylvania and Indiana, states which held local elections in October. He spoke at Easton, Reading, Pittsburgh, and Erie. At Cincinnati his voice failed but the next day, at Indianapolis, he was able to

address an enormous meeting. October 5 found him in Chicago, where he was welcomed by a procession four miles long. "I'm no alarmist," he told the thousands who had gathered to hear him, "but I believe that this country is in more danger now than at any other moment since I have known anything of public life. It is not personal ambition that has induced me to take the stump this year. I say to you who know me that the Presidency has no charms for me. . . . But I do love this Union. There is no sacrifice on earth that I would not make to preserve it."

Douglas was at Cedar Rapids, Iowa, when he learned that the Republicans had carried both Pennsylvania and Indiana in the state elections. "Mr. Lincoln is the next President," he told his secretary. "We must try to save the Union. I will go South."

South he went, to spend most of his time until election day delivering speeches in hostile territory, and conferring with local leaders in the hope of persuading them to hold to the old and honored allegiance. The mission was hopeless, and Douglas knew it, but he held on to the end, speaking on the day before the election at Mobile, Alabama, and remaining there the following day to receive the returns. As they came in, and he saw that Lincoln had won, he sank into despondency deeper than his secretary, who was with him, had ever before seen.

Inexorably, the country approached dissolution. South Carolina passed her Ordinance of Secession on December 20. By March 4, 1861, when Lincoln took the oath of office, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas had followed the lead of the Palmetto State. In Washington Douglas worked tirelessly for a compromise which would restore the Union, but he permitted no one to infer, from his efforts, that he had weakened in his conviction that secession was treason. It was significant, and a matter of no small importance, that he held Lincoln's hat while the President delivered his inaugural address, and that he and Mrs. Douglas were among

the first to call at the White House, thus setting an example for Washington society matrons inclined to look down their noses at the new occupants.

On the early morning of April 12, as all the world knows, Beauregard opened fire on Fort Sumter. Thirty-four hours later Major Robert Anderson lowered the Stars and Stripes. Over the country people crowded in front of newspaper offices for the latest bulletins, and eagerly snapped up extra editions. No dispatch was welcomed more eagerly in the North, and read with greater gratification, than one dated Washington, April 14:

"Mr. Douglas called on the President," it read, "and had an interesting conversation on the present condition of the country. The substance of the conversation was that, while Mr. Douglas was unalterably opposed to the Administration on all its political issues, he was prepared to sustain the President in the exercise of all his constitutional functions to preserve the Union, and maintain the Government and defend the Federal capital. A firm policy and prompt action was necessary. The Capital of our country was in danger and must be defended at all hazards, and at any expense of men and money." Douglas must have thought back over nearly thirty years, for he had written the dispatch himself, as he added a final sentence: "He spoke of the present and future without reference to the past."

In a few days word reached Douglas that despite his forthright stand all was not well in the West, especially in Illinois. The southern part of the state had been settled in the main by people from Kentucky and Tennessee who saw no great evil in slavery and continued to maintain close ties with the South. Yet the section was heavily Democratic. Here, if anywhere, Douglas could make his influence felt. With Mrs. Douglas he headed West. At Bellaire, on the Ohio River, they missed a train connection. When word spread that the Senator was in town a crowd gathered and would not be denied a speech. Douglas responded soberly. "The very existence," he

told his audience, "of the people in this great valley depends upon maintaining inviolate and forever that great right secured by the Constitution, of freedom of trade, of transit, and of commerce, from the center of the continent to the ocean that surrounds it." Again the realist, never unmindful of political and economic fundamentals. "This great valley must never be divided. The Almighty has so arranged the mountain, and the plain, and the water-courses as to show that this valley in all time shall remain one and indissoluble. Let no man attempt to sunder what Divine Providence has rendered indivisible."

That same evening Douglas reached Columbus. Again, when his presence became known, there were calls for a speech. Though very tired, he made a brief response, ending with an appeal to people of all parties to close ranks in defense of the Union. The next day he was in Indianapolis, where he exhorted both Democrats and Republicans "to rise up and unsheathe the sword in defense of our constitutional rights, and never sheathe it until they are secure."

On April 25 he reached Springfield, where the legislature was in session. There he soon learned that the reports of disaffection he had heard were not exaggerated. Probably John A. Logan from Murphysboro who, given time, would raise a Union regiment, win a high reputation as a major-general, found Memorial day, and be represented in Chicago by a striking statue, was blunter than most when he told Douglas: "You have sold out the Democratic party but, by God, you can't deliver it!" Yet indubitably Logan spoke for a segment of opinion that could not be ignored.

No time was lost in arranging for Douglas to address a joint session of the legislature. On the night of the 25th the members of the General Assembly, and as many others as could find standing room, jammed into the Hall of the House of Representatives and the adjoining corridors. When Douglas entered, promptly at eight o'clock, the audience stood up and cheered. When he rose to speak a few minutes later, he was

greeted with ear-splitting cheers and volleys of applause.

His theme was by now familiar, but as he developed it on this warm spring night it became irresistibly convincing. Secession, he declared, was treason, and all men, regardless of party affiliation, must support the government. Hostile armies were marching on the federal capital, and officials of the Confederacy—so Douglas said—were boasting that by the Fourth of July they would hold possession of Independence Hall.

“The simple question presented to us,” he continued, “is whether we will wait for the enemy to carry out his boast . . . or whether we will rush as one man to the defence of the government and its capital. . . .”

“My friends, I can say no more,” the speaker concluded. “To discuss these topics is the most painful duty of my life. It is with a sad heart—with a grief that I have never before experienced, that I have to contemplate this fearful struggle; but I believe in my conscience that it is a duty we owe to ourselves and our children, and our God, to protect this government and that flag from every assailant, be he who he may.”

As Douglas finished men wept and cheered by turns, and hundreds who, a few months earlier, had looked upon him as their arch enemy shouted in praise. “A triumphant call to arms in defence of country, Government and Constitutional Liberty,” said the once-hostile *Illinois State Journal*. “By his noble support of his country, Mr. Douglas has endeared himself to every loyal citizen in our broad land.”

For several days Douglas remained in Springfield to add personal persuasion to what he had expressed publicly, then proceeded to Chicago. Although the time of his arrival was late—9:00 on the evening of May 1—the city gave him a tumultuous welcome. A long procession escorted him to the Wigwam, where Lincoln had been nominated less than a year earlier. All seats except those reserved for Douglas and the welcoming committee had been taken for hours. Because of the hour he spoke briefly, hammering home once more the theme he had been stressing since the attack on Fort Sumter.

But his conclusion had unaccustomed brevity and force. "There are only two sides to the question," he declared. "Every man must be for the United States or against it." And then his deep voice rolled to the far corners of the hall: "There can be no neutrals in this war, *only patriots—or traitors!*"

Before he spoke Douglas confessed to close friends that he was exhausted, and that he would need a long rest before he could return to Washington. The following morning he called a physician. Acute rheumatism was the first diagnosis. Before fatal complications developed he made one more appeal to the patriotism of his fellow Democrats. The occasion was a letter from the chairman of the Illinois State Democratic Committee asking Douglas for a full statement of his position. On May 10 the Senator, after apologizing for having to use an amanuensis, recapitulated the arguments he had been advancing ever since Sumter, and then summed up in one sentence: "If we hope to regain and perpetuate the ascendancy of our party, we should never forget that a man cannot be a true Democrat unless he is a loyal patriot."

Small wonder, then, that Douglas's death plunged Chicago into sadness. Small wonder that his funeral, held on June 7, brought the largest outpouring of mourners the city had ever seen, with thousands marching from Bryan Hall, where his body had lain in state, to the burial place—his own quiet acres where he had planned to spend his years of retirement, marked now by his impressive monument. Well could the *Chicago Tribune*, long his caustic critic, comment that the day made "a memorable addition . . . to the list of occasions where the people have thronged sad, yet eager for a parting tribute of respect to a great popular leader, for such will ever remain in the history of these times the name of Douglas."

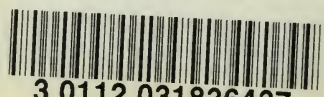
History has not dealt generously with Stephen A. Douglas. Although he overshadowed Lincoln until 1860, he has been the subject of only a handful of books while thousands of volumes have been devoted to the life of his rival. All too often, moreover, those who have written of Lincoln have

tended to belittle Douglas, picturing him as an opportunist with at best a stunted sense of morality. The position he took in the Debates—that the government of the United States “was made by white men for the benefit of white men and their posterity forever”—has been emphasized by many who have overlooked the fact that at the time, Lincoln’s attitude was essentially the same.

It was Douglas’s misfortune to be of his times rather than ahead of them. When he said that he did not care whether slavery be voted up or down, he was speaking for millions of his countrymen. That attitude, under the stress of war, soon became as anachronistic as belief in the right to practice polygamy. Lincoln changed his views on slavery, but Douglas’s record was complete.

Today, in a world aroused about the status of people of color, many find it impossible to attribute greatness to a man who frankly proclaimed his indifference. Such a view ignores the very large contribution Douglas made to the nation. It ignores his part in the building of the Illinois Central Railroad and in effecting the Compromise of 1850. It ignores the fact that he did succeed in organizing Kansas and Nebraska as territories and start them on their way to statehood. It ignores his belief in a fundamental democratic principle—popular sovereignty—and his courage in jeopardizing his political future by defying Buchanan when the President sanctioned a violation. Above all, it ignores the selfless effort he made to hold the South in the Union, and after that failed, to assure Lincoln of the support of a united North. In this effort Douglas gave his life. His name deserves a place on the roll of great Americans.

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